Mundus Imaginalis,
or
the Imaginary and the Imaginal

by Henri Corbin

In offering the two Latin words *mundus imaginalis* as the title of this discussion, I intend to treat a precise order of reality corresponding to a precise mode of perception, because Latin terminology gives the advantage of providing us with a technical and fixed point of reference, to which we can compare the various more-or-less irresolute equivalents that our modern Western languages suggest to us.

I will make an immediate admission. The choice of these two words was imposed upon me some time ago, because it was impossible for me, in what I had to translate or say, to be satisfied with the word *imaginary*. This is by no means a criticism addressed to those of us for whom the use of the language constrains recourse to this word, since we are trying together to reevaluate it in a positive sense. Regardless of our efforts, though, we cannot prevent the term *imaginary*, in current usage that is not deliberate, from being equivalent to signifying unreal, something that is and remains outside of being and existence-in brief, something *utopian*. I was absolutely obliged to find another term because, for many years, I have been by vocation and profession an interpreter of Arabic and Persian texts, the purposes of which I would certainly have betrayed if I had been entirely and simply content-even with every possible precaution-with the term *imaginary*. I was absolutely obliged to find another term if I did not want to mislead the Western reader that it is a matter of uprooting long-established habits of thought, in order to awaken him to an order of things, the sense of which it is the mission of our colloquia at the "Society of Symbolism" to rouse.

In other words, if we usually speak of the *imaginary* as the unreal, the utopian, this must contain the symptom of something. In contrast to this something, we may examine briefly together the order of reality that I designate as *mundus imaginalis*, and what our theosophers in Islam designate as the "eighth climate"; we will then examine the organ that perceives this reality, namely, the imaginative consciousness, the *cognitive* Imagination; and finally, we will present several examples, among many others, of course, that suggest to us the topography of these interworlds, as they have been seen by those who *actually* have been there.

1. "NA-KOJA-ABAD" OR THE "EIGHTH CLIMATE" I have just mentioned the word *utopian*. It is a strange thing, or a decisive example, that our authors use a term in Persian that seems to be its linguistic calque: *Na-kojd-Abad*, the "land of No-where." This, however, is something entirely different from a *utopia*.

Let us take the very beautiful tales-simultaneously visionary tales and tales of spiritual initiation-composed in Persian by Sohravardi, the young shaykh who, in the twelfth century, was the "reviver of the theosophy of ancient Persia" in Islamic Iran. Each time, the visionary finds himself, at the beginning of the tale, in the presence of a supernatural figure of great beauty, whom the visionary asks *who* he is and from *where* he comes. These tales essentially illustrate the experience of the gnostic, lived as the personal history of the Stranger, the captive who aspires to return home.

At the beginning of the tale that Sohravardi entitles "The Crimson Archangel,"[1] the captive, who has just escaped the surveillance of his jailers, that is, has temporarily left the world of sensory experience, finds himself in the desert in the presence of a being whom he asks, since he sees in him all the charms of adolescence, "0 Youth! where do you come from?" He receives this reply: "What? I am the first-born of the children of the Creator [in gnostic terms, the *Protoktistos*, the First-Created] and you call me a youth?" There, in this origin, is the mystery of the crimson color that clothes his appearance: that of a being of pure Light whose splendor the sensory world reduces to the crimson of twilight. "I come from beyond the mountain of Qaf... It is there that you were yourself at the beginning, and it is there that you will return when you are finally rid of your bonds."

The mountain of Qaf is the cosmic mountain constituted from summit to summit, valley to valley, by the celestial Spheres that are enclosed one inside the other. What, then, is the road that leads out of it? How long is it? "No matter how long you walk," he is told, "it is at the point of departure that you arrive there again," like the point of the compass returning to the same place. Does this involve simply leaving oneself in order to attain oneself) Not exactly. Between the two, a great event will have changed everything; the *self* that is found there is the one that is beyond the mountain of Qaf a superior *self*, a self "in the second person." It will have been necessary, like Khezr (or Khadir, the mysterious prophet, the eternal wanderer, Elijah or one like him) to bathe in the Spring of Life. "He who has found the meaning of True Reality has arrived at that Spring. When he emerges from the Spring, he has achieved the Aptitude that makes him like a balm, a drop of which you distill in the hollow of your hand by holding it facing the sun, and which then passes through to the back of your hand. If you are Khezr, you also may pass without difficulty through the mountain of Qaf.

Two other mystical tales give a name to that "beyond the mountain of Qaf and it is this name itself that marks the transformation from cosmic mountain to *psychocosmic* mountain, that is, the transition of the physical cosmos to what constitutes the first level of the spiritual universe. In the tale entitled "The Rustling of Gabriel's Wings," the figure again appears who, in the works of Avicenna, is named *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* ("the Living, son of the Watchman") and who, just now, was designated as the Crimson Archangel. The question that must be asked is asked, and the reply is this: "I come from *Na-koja-Abad*."[2] Finally, in the tale entitled "Vade Mecum of the Faithful in Love" (*Mu'nis al-'oshshaq*) which places on stage a cosmogonic triad whose dramatis personae are, respectively, Beauty, Love, and Sadness, Sadness appears to Ya'qab weeping for Joseph in the land of Canaan. To the question, "What horizon did you penetrate to come here?," the same reply is given: "I come from *Na-koja-Abad*

Na-koja-Abad is a strange term. It does not occur in any Persian dictionary, and it was coined, as far as I know, by Sohravardi himself, from the resources of the purest Persian language. Literally, as I mentioned a moment ago, it signifies the city, the country or land (*abad*) of No-where (*Na-koja*) That is why we are here in the presence of a term that, at first sight, may appear to us as the exact equivalent of the term *ou-topia*, which, for its part, does not occur in the classical Greek dictionaries, and was coined by Thomas More as an abstract noun to designate the absence of any localization, of any given *situs* in a space that is discoverable and verifiable by the experience of our senses. Etymologically and literally, it would perhaps be exact to translate *Na-koja-Abad* by *outopia*, utopia, and yet with regard to the concept, the intention, and the true meaning, I believe that we would be guilty of mistranslation. It seems to me, therefore, that it is of fundamental importance to try, at least, to determine why this would be a mistranslation.

It is even a matter of indispensable precision, if we want to understand the meaning and the real implication of manifold information concerning the topographies explored in the visionary state, the state intermediate between waking and sleep-information that, for example, among the spiritual individuals of Shi'ite Islam, concerns the "land of the hidden Imam" A matter of precision that, in

making us attentive to a differential affecting an entire region of the soul, and thus an entire spiritual culture, would lead us to ask: what conditions make possible that which we ordinarily call a utopia, and consequently the type of utopian man? How and why does it make its appearance? I wonder, in fact, whether the equivalent would be found anywhere in Islamic thought in its *traditional* form. I do not believe, for example, that when Farabi, in the tenth century, describes the "Perfect City," or when the Andalusian philosopher Ibn Bajja (Avempace), in the twelfth century, takes up the same theme in his "Regime of the Solitary"3 -I do not believe that either one of them contemplated what we call today a social or political utopia. To understand them in this way would be, I am afraid, to withdraw them from their own presuppositions and perspectives, in order to impose our own, our own dimensions; above all, I am afraid that it would be certain to entail resigning ourselves to confusing the Spiritual City with an imaginary City.

The word *Na-koja-Abad* does not designate something like unextended being, in the dimensionless state. The Persian word *abad* certainly signifies a city, a cultivated and peopled land, thus something extended. What Sohravardi means by being "beyond the mountain of Qaf is that he himself, and with him the entire theosophical tradition of Iran, represents the composite of the mystical cities of Jabalqa, Jabarsa, and Hurqalya. Topographically, he states precisely that this region begins "on the convex surface" of the Ninth Sphere, the Sphere of Spheres, or the Sphere that includes the whole of the cosmos. This means that it begins at the exact moment when one leaves the supreme Sphere, which defines all possible orientation in our world (or on this side of the world), the "Sphere" to which the celestial cardinal points refer. It is evident that once this boundary is crossed, the question "*where?*" (*ubi, koja*) loses its meaning, at least the meaning in which it is asked in the space of our sensory experience. Thus the name *Na-koja-Abad*: a place outside of place, a "place" that is not contained in a place, in a *topos*, that permits a response, with a gesture of the hand, to the question "*where?*" But when we say, "To depart from the *where*," what does this mean?

It surely cannot relate to a change of local position,4 a physical transfer from one place to another place, as though it involved places contained in a single homogeneous space. As is suggested, at the end of Sohravardi's tale, by the symbol of the drop of balm exposed in the hollow of the hand to the sun, it is a matter of entering, passing *into the interior* and, in passing into the interior, of finding oneself, paradoxically, *outside*, or, in the language of our authors, "on the convex surface" of the Ninth Sphere--in other words, "beyond the mountain of Qaf The relationship involved is essentially that of the external, the visible, the exoteric (Arabic, *zahir*), and the internal, the invisible, the esoteric (Arabic, *batin*), or the natural world and the spiritual world. To depart from the *where*, the category of ubi, is to leave the external or natural appearances that enclose the hidden internal realities, as the almond is hidden beneath the shell. This step is made in order for the Stranger, the gnostic, to return *home*-or at least to lead to that return.

But an odd thing happens: once this transition is accomplished, it turns out that henceforth this reality, previously internal and hidden, is revealed to be enveloping, surrounding, containing what was first of all external and visible, since by means of *interiorization*, one has *departed* from that *external* reality. Henceforth, it is spiritual reality that envelops, surrounds, contains the reality called material. That is why spiritual reality is not "in the *where*." It is the "*where*" that is in it. Or, rather, it is itself the "*where*" of all things; it is, therefore, not itself in a place, it does not fall under the question "*where?*"-the category ubi referring to a place in sensory space. Its place (its *abad*) in relation to this is *Na-koja* (No-where), because its *ubi* in relation to what is *in* sensory space is an *ubique* (everywhere). When we have understood this, we have perhaps understood what is essential to follow the topography of visionary experiences, to distinguish their meaning (that is, the signification and the direction simultaneously) and also to distinguish something fundamental, namely, what differentiates the visionary perceptions of our spiritual individuals (Sohravardi and

many others) with regard to everything that our modern vocabulary subsumes under the pejorative sense of creations, imaginings, even *utopian* madness.

But what we must begin to destroy, to the extent that we are able to do so, even at the cost of a struggle resumed every day, is what may be called the "agnostic reflex" in Western man, because he has consented to the divorce between *thought* and *being*. How many recent theories tacitly originate in this reflex, thanks to which we hope to escape the *other* reality before which certain experiences and certain evidence place us-and to escape it, in the case where we secretly submit to its attraction, by giving it all sorts of ingenious explanations, except one: the one that would permit it truly to mean for us, by its existence, what it is! For it to mean that to us, we must, at all events, have available a cosmology of such a kind that the most astounding information of modern science regarding the physical universe remains inferior to it. For, insofar as it is a matter of that sort of information, we remain bound to what is "on this side of the mountain of Qaf What distinguishes the traditional cosmology of the theosophers in Islam, for example, is that its structurewhere the worlds and interworlds "beyond the mountain of Qaf that is, beyond the physical universes, are arranged in levels intelligible only for an existence in which the *act of being* is in accordance with its *presence* in those worlds, for reciprocally, it is in accordance with this act of being that these worlds are present to it.5 What dimension, then, must this *act of being* have in order to be, or to become in the course of its future rebirths, the *place* of those worlds that are *outside the place* of our natural space? And, first of all, what are those worlds?

I can only refer here to a few texts. A larger number will be found translated and grouped in the book that I have entitled *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*.6 In his "Book of Conversations," Sohravardi writes: "When you learn in the treatises of the ancient Sages that there exists a world provided with dimensions and extension, other than the pleroma of Intelligences [that is, a world below that of the pure archangelic Intelligences], and other than the world governed by the Souls of the Spheres [that is, a world which, while having dimension and extension, is other than the world of sensory phenomena, and superior to it, including the sidereal universe, the planets and the "fixed stars"], a world where there are cities whose number it is impossible to count, cities among which our Prophet himself named Jabalqa and Jabarsa, do not hasten to call it a lie, for pilgrims of the spirit may contemplate that world, and they find there everything that is the object of their desire."7

These few lines refer us to a schema on which all of our mystical theosophers agree, a schema that articulates three universes or, rather, three categories of universe. There is our physical sensory world, which includes both our earthly world (governed by human souls) and the sidereal universe (governed by the Souls of the Spheres); this is the sensory world, the world of phenomena (*molk*). There is the suprasensory world of the Soul or Angel-Souls, the *Malakut*, in which there are the mystical cities that we have just named, and which begins "on the convex surface of the Ninth Sphere." There is the universe of pure archangelic Intelligences. To these three universes correspond three organs of knowledge: the senses, the imagination, and the intellect, a triad to which corresponds the triad of anthropology: body, soul, spirit-a triad that regulates the triple growth of man, extending from this world to the resurrections in the other worlds.

We observe immediately that we are no longer reduced to the dilemma of thought and extension, to the schema of a cosmology and a gnoseology limited to the empirical world and the world of abstract understanding. Between the two is placed an intermediate world, which our authors designate as *'alam al-mithal*, the world of the Image, *mundus imaginalis*: a world as ontologically real as the world of the senses and the world of the intellect, a world that requires a faculty of perception belonging to it, a faculty that is a cognitive function, a *noetic* value, as fully real as the faculties of sensory perception or intellectual intuition. This faculty is the imaginative power, the one we must avoid confusing with the imagination that modern man identifies with "fantasy" and

that, according to him, produces only the "imaginary." Here we are, then, simultaneously at the heart of our research and of our problem of terminology.

What is that intermediate universe? It is the one we mentioned a little while ago as being called the "eighth climate."[8] For all of our thinkers, in fact, the world of extension perceptible to the senses includes the *seven climates* of their traditional geography. But there is still another climate, represented by that world which, however, possesses extension and dimensions, forms and colors, without their being perceptible to the senses, as they are when they are properties of physical bodies. No, these dimensions, shapes, and colors are the proper object of imaginative perception or the "psycho- spiritual senses"; and that world, fully objective and real, where everything existing in the sensory world has its analogue, but not perceptible by the senses, is the world that is designated as the *eighth climate*. The term is sufficiently eloquent by itself, since it signifies a climate *outside* of climates, a place *outside* of place, outside of *where* (*Na-koja-Abad*!).

The technical term that designates it in Arabic, *'alam a mithal*, can perhaps also be translated by *mundus archetypus*, ambiguity is avoided. For it is the same word that serves in Arabic to designate the Platonic Ideas (interpreted by Sohravardi terms of Zoroastrian angelology). However, when the term refers to Platonic Ideas, it is almost always accompanied by this precise qualification: *mothol* (plural of *mithal*) *aflatuniya nuraniya*, the "Platonic archetypes of light." When the term refers to the world of the eighth climate, it designates technically, on one hand, the *Archetype-Images* of individual and singular things; in this case, it relates to the *eastern* region of the eighth climate, the city of Jabalqa, where these images subsist preexistent to and ordered before the sensory world. But on the other hand, the term also relates to the *western* region, the city of Jabarsa, as being the world or interworld in which are found the Spirits after their presence in the natural terrestrial world and as a world in which subsist the forms of all works accomplished, the forms of our thoughts and our desires, of our presentiments and our behavior.[9] It is this composition that constitutes *'alam al-mithal*, the *mundus imaginalis*.

Technically, again, our thinkers designate it as the world of "Images in suspense" (*mothol mo'allaqa*). Sohravardi! and his school mean by this a mode of being proper to the realities of that intermediate world, which we designate as *Imaginalia*.[10] The precise nature of this ontological status results from vision any spiritual experiences, on which Sohravardi asks that we rely fully, exactly as we rely in astronomy on the observations of Hipparchus or Ptolemy. It should be acknowledged that forms and shapes in the *mundus imaginalis* do not subsist in the same manner as empirical realities in the physical world; otherwise anyone could perceive them. It should also be noted that the) cannot subsist in the pure intelligible world, since they have extension and dimension, an "immaterial" materiality, certainly, in relation to that of the sensory world, but, in fact, their own "corporeality" and spatiality (one might think here of the expression used by Henry More, a Cambridge Platonist, *spissitudo spiritualis*, an expression that has its exact equivalent in the work of Sadra Shirazi, a Persian Platonist). For the same reason, that they could have only our thought as a substratum would be excluded, as it would, at the same time, that they might be unreal, nothing; otherwise, we could not discern them, classify them into hierarchies, or make judgments about them. The existence of this intermediate world, *mundus imaginalis*, thus appears metaphysically necessary; the cognitive function of the Imagination is ordered to it; it is a world whose ontological level is above the world of the senses and below the pure intelligible world; it is more immaterial than the former and less immaterial than the latter.[11] There has always been something of major importance in this for all our mystical theosophers. Upon it depends, for them, both the validity of visionary accounts that perceive and relate "events in Heaven" and the validity of dreams, symbolic rituals, the reality of places formed by intense meditation, the reality of inspired imaginative visions, cosmogonies and theogonies, and thus, in the first place, the truth of the *spiritual sense* perceived in the imaginative data of prophetic revelations.[12]

In short, that world is the world of "subtle bodies," the idea of which proves indispensable if one wishes to describe a link between the pure spirit and the material body. It is this which relates to the designation of their mode of being as "in suspense," that is, a mode of being such that the Image or Form, since it is itself its own "matter," is independent of any substratum in which it would be immanent in the manner of an accident.13 This means that it would not subsist as the color black, for example, subsists by means of the black object in which it is immanent, The comparison to which our authors regularly have recourse is the mode of appearance and subsistence of Images "in suspense" in a mirror. The material substance of the mirror, metal or mineral, is not the substance of the image, a substance whose image would be an accident. It is simply the "place of its appearance." This led to a general theory of epiphanic places and forms (*mazhar*, plural *mazahir*) so characteristic of Sohravardi's *Eastern Theosophy*.

The active Imagination is the preeminent *mirror*, the epiphanic place of the Images of the archetypal world; that is why the theory of the *mundus imaginalis* is bound up with a theory of imaginative knowledge and imaginative function--a function truly central and mediatory, because of the median and mediatory position of the *mundus imaginalis*. It is a function that permits all the universes to *symbolize with one another* (or exist in symbolic relationship with one another) and that leads us to represent to ourselves, experimentally, that the same substantial realities assume forms corresponding respectively to each universe (for example, Jabalqa and Jabarsa correspond in the subtle world to the Elements of the physical world, while Hurqalya corresponds there to the Sky). It is the cognitive function of the Imagination that permits the establishment of a rigorous *analogical knowledge*, escaping the dilemma of current rationalism, which leaves only a choice between the two terms of banal dualism: either "matter" or "spirit," a dilemma that the "socialization" of consciousness resolves by substituting a choice that is no less fatal: either "history" or "myth."

This is the sort of dilemma that has never defeated those familiar with the "eighth climate," the realm of "subtle bodies," of "spiritual bodies," threshold of the *Malakut* or world of the Soul. We understand that when they say that the world of Hurqalya begins "on the convex surface of the supreme Sphere," they wish to signify symbolically that this world is at the boundary where there is an inversion of the relation of interiority expressed by the preposition *in* or *within*, "in the interior of." Spiritual bodies or spiritual entities are no longer *in* a world, not even *in* their world, in the way that a material body is in its place, or is contained in another body. It is their world that is *in* them. That is why the *Theology* attributed to Aristotle, the Arabic version of the last three *Enneads* of Plotinus, which Avicenna annotated and which all of our thinkers read and meditated upon, explains that each spiritual entity is "in the totality of the sphere of its Heaven"; each subsists, certainly, independently of the other, but all are simultaneous and each is within every other one. It would be completely false to picture that other world as an undifferentiated, informal heaven. There is multiplicity, of course, but the relations of spiritual space differ from the relations of space understood *under* the starry Heaven, as much as the fact of being *in* a body differs from the fact of being "in the totality of its Heaven." That is why it can be said that "behind this world there is a Sky, an Earth, an ocean, animals, plants, and celestial men; but every being there is celestial; the spiritual entities there correspond to the human beings there, but no earthly thing is there."

The most exact formulation of all this, in the theosophical tradition of the West, is found perhaps in Swedenborg. One cannot but be struck by the concordance or convergence of the statements by the great Swedish visionary with those of Sohravardi, Ibn 'Arabi, or Sadra Shirazi. Swedenborg explains that "all things in heaven appear, just as in the world, to be in place and in space, and yet the angels have no notion or idea of place or space." This is because "all changes of place in the spiritual world are effected by changes of state in the interiors, which means that change of place is nothing else than change of state.... Those are near each other who are in like states, and those are at

a distance who are in unlike states; and spaces in heaven are simply the external conditions corresponding to the internal states. For the same reason the heavens are distinct from each other. . . . When anyone goes from one place to another . . . he arrives more quickly when he eagerly desires it, and less quickly when he does not, the way itself being lengthened and shortened in accordance with the desire.... This I have often seen to my surprise. All this again makes clear how distances, and consequently spaces, are wholly in accord with states of the interiors of angels; and this being so, no notion or idea of space can enter their thought, although there are spaces with them equally as in the world."[14]

Such a description is eminently appropriate to *Na-koja-Abad* and its mysterious Cities. In short, it follows that there is a spiritual place and a corporeal place. The transfer of one to the other is absolutely not effected according to the laws of our homogeneous physical space. In relation to the corporeal place, the spiritual place is a *No-where*, and for the one who reaches *Na-koja-Abad* everything occurs inversely to the evident facts of ordinary consciousness, which remains orientated to the interior of our space. For henceforth it is the *where*, the place, that resides in the soul; it is the corporeal substance that resides in the spiritual substance; it is the soul that encloses and bears the body. This is why it is not possible to say *where* the spiritual place is situated; it is not situated, it is, rather, that which situates, it is situative. Its *ubi* is an ubique. Certainly, there may be topographical correspondences between the sensory world and the *mundus imaginalis*, one symbolizing with the other. However, there is no passage from one to the other without a breach. Many accounts show us this. One sets out; at a given moment, there is a break with the geographical coordinates that can be located on our maps. But the "traveler" is not conscious of the precise moment; he does not realize it, with disquiet or wonder, until later. If he were aware of it, he could change his path at will, or he could indicate it to others. But he can only describe where he was; he cannot show the way to anyone.

II. THE SPIRITUAL IMAGINATION

We will touch here on the decisive point for which all that precedes has prepared us, namely, the organ that permits penetration into the *mundus imaginalis*, the migration to the "eighth climate." What is the organ by means of which that migration occurs-the migration that is the return *ab extra ad intra* (from the exterior to the interior), the topographical inversion (the *intussusception*)? It is neither the senses nor the faculties of the physical organism, nor is it the pure intellect, but it is that intermediate power whose function appears as the preeminent mediator: the active Imagination. Let us be very clear when we speak of this. It is the organ that permits the transmutation of internal spiritual states into external states, into vision-events symbolizing with those internal states. It is by means of this transmutation that all progression in spiritual space is accomplished, or, rather, this transmutation is itself what spatializes that space, what causes space, proximity, distance, and remoteness to be there.

A *first postulate* is that this Imagination is a pure spiritual faculty, independent of the physical organism, and consequently is able to subsist after the disappearance of the latter. Sadra Shirazi, among others, has expressed himself repeatedly on this point with particular forcefulness.[15] He

says that just as the soul is independent of the physical material body in receiving intelligible things in act, according to its intellective power, the soul is equally independent with regard to its *imaginative power* and its *imaginative operations*. In addition, when it is separated from this world, since it continues to have its active Imagination at its service, it can perceive by itself, by its own essence and by that faculty, concrete things whose existence, as it is actualized in its knowledge and in its imagination, constitutes *eo ipso* the very form of concrete existence of those things (in other words: consciousness and its object are here ontologically inseparable). All these powers are gathered and concentrated in a single faculty, which is the active Imagination. Because it has stopped dispersing itself at the various thresholds that are the five senses of the physical body, and has stopped being solicited by the concerns of the physical body, which is prey to the vicissitudes of the external world, the imaginative perception can finally show its essential superiority over sensory perception.

"All the faculties of the soul," writes Sadra Shirazi, "have become as though a single faculty, which is the power to configure and typify (*taswir* and *tamthil*); its imagination has itself become like a sensory perception of the suprasensory: its *imaginative sight* is itself like its sensory sight. Similarly, its senses of hearing, smell, taste, and touch-all these *imaginative senses*-are themselves like sensory faculties, but regulated to the suprasensory. For although *externally* the sensory faculties are five in number, each having its organ localized in the body, *internally*, in fact, all of them constitute a single *synaisthesis* (*hiss moshtarik*)." The Imagination being therefore like the *currus subtilis* (in Greek *okhema*, vehicle, or [in Proclus, Iamblichus, etc.] spiritual body) of the soul, there is an entire physiology of the "subtle body" and thus of the "resurrection body," which Sadra Shirazi discusses in these contexts. That is why he reproaches even Avicenna for having identified these acts of posthumous imaginative perception with what happens in this life during sleep, for here, and during sleep, the imaginative power is disturbed by the organic operations that occur in the physical body. Much is required for it to enjoy its maximum of perfection and activity, freedom and purity. Otherwise, sleep would be simply an awakening in the other world. This is not the case, as is alluded to in this remark attributed sometimes to the Prophet and sometimes to the First Imam of the Shi'ites: "Humans sleep. It is when they die that they awake."

A *second postulate*, evidence for which compels recognition, is that the spiritual Imagination is a cognitive power, an organ of true knowledge. Imaginative perception and imaginative consciousness have their own *noetic* (cognitive) function and value, in relation to the world that is theirs-the world, we have said, which is the *'alam al-mithal, mundus imaginalis*, the world of the mystical cities such as Hurqalya, where time becomes reversible and where space is a function of desire, because it is only the external aspect of an internal state.

The Imagination is thus firmly *balanced* between two other cognitive functions: its own world *symbolizes with* the world to which the two other functions (sensory knowledge and intellective knowledge) respectively correspond. There is accordingly something like a control that keeps the Imagination from wanderings and profligacy, and that permits it to assume its full function: to cause the occurrence, for example, of the events that are related by the visionary tales of Sohravardi and all those of the same kind, because every approach to the eighth climate is made by the imaginative path. It may be said that this is the reason for the extraordinary gravity of mystical epic poems written in Persian (from 'Attar to jami and to Nur 'Ali1-Shah), which constantly amplify the same archetypes in new symbols. In order for the Imagination to wander and become profligate, for it to cease fulfilling its function, which is to perceive or generate symbols leading to the internal sense, it is necessary for the *mundus imaginalis*--the proper domain of the *Malakut*, the world of the Soul-to disappear. Perhaps it is necessary, in the West, to date the beginning of this decadence at the time when Averroism rejected Avicennian cosmology, with its intermediate angelic hierarchy of the *Animae* or *Angeli caelestes*. These Angeli caelestes (a hierarchy below that of the *Angeli*

intellectuales) had the privilege of imaginative power in its pure state. Once the universe of these Souls disappeared, it was the imaginative function as such that was *unbalanced* and devalued. It is easy to understand, then, the advice given later by Paracelsus, warning against any confusion of the *Imaginatio vera*, as the alchemists said, with fantasy, "that cornerstone of the mad."16

This is the reason that we can no longer avoid the problem of terminology. How is it that we do not have in French [or in English] a common and perfectly satisfying term to express the idea of the *'alam al-mithal*? I have proposed the Latin *mundus imaginalis* for it, because we are obliged to avoid any confusion between what is here the *object* of imaginative or imaginant perception and what we ordinarily call the *imaginary*. This is so, because the current attitude is to oppose the real to the imaginary as though to the unreal, the utopian, as it is to confuse symbol with allegory, to confuse the exegesis of the *spiritual sense* with an allegorical interpretation. Now, every allegorical interpretation is harmless; the allegory is a sheathing, or, rather, a disguising, of something that is already known or knowable otherwise, while the appearance of an Image having the quality of a symbol is a primary phenomenon (*Urphanomen*), unconditional and irreducible, the appearance of something that cannot manifest itself otherwise to the world where we are.

Neither the tales of Sohravardi, nor the tales which in the Shi'ite tradition tell us of reaching the "land of the Hidden Imam," are imaginary, unreal, or allegorical, precisely because the eighth climate or the "land of No-where" is not what we commonly call a *utopia*. It is certainly a world that remains beyond the empirical verification of our sciences. Otherwise, anyone could find access to it and evidence for it. It is a suprasensory world, insofar as it is not perceptible except by the imaginative perception, and insofar as the events that occur in it cannot be experienced except by the imaginative or imaginant consciousness. Let us be certain that we understand, here again, that this is not a matter simply of what the language of our time calls an imagination, but of a *vision* that is *Imaginatio vera*. And it is to this *Imaginatio vera* that we must attribute a *noetic* or plenary cognitive value. If we are no longer capable of speaking about the imagination except as "fantasy," if we cannot utilize it or tolerate it except as such, it is perhaps because we have forgotten the norms and the rules and the "axial ordination" that are responsible for the *cognitive function* of the imaginative power (the function that I have sometimes designated as *imaginatory*).

For the world into which our witnesses have penetrated-we will meet two or three of those witnesses in the final section of this study-is a perfectly *real* world, more evident even and more coherent, in its own reality, than the *real* empirical world perceived by the senses. Its witnesses were afterward perfectly conscious that they had been "elsewhere"; they are not schizorphrenics. It is a matter of a world that is hidden in the act itself of sensory perception, and one that we must find under the apparent objective certainty of that kind of perception. That is why we positively cannot qualify it as *imaginary*, in the current sense in which the word is taken to mean unreal, nonexistent. Just as the Latin word *origo* has given us the derivative "original," I believe that the word *imago* can give us, along with *imaginary*, and by regular derivation, the term *imaginal*. We will thus have the *imaginal* world be intermediate between the *sensory* world and the *intelligible* world. When we encounter the Arabic term *jism mithali* to designate the "subtle body" that penetrates into the "eighth climate," or the "resurrection body," we will be able to translate it literally as *imaginal body*, but certainly not as *imaginary body*. Perhaps, then, we will have less difficulty in placing the figures who belong neither to "myth" nor to "history," and perhaps we will have a sort of password to the path to the "lost continent."

In order to embolden us on this path, we have to ask ourselves what constitutes our *real*, the *real* for us, so that if we leave it, would we have more than the imaginary, utopia? And what is the *real* for our traditional Eastern thinkers, so that they may have access to the "eighth climate," to *Na-koja-Abad*, by leaving the sensory place without leaving the real, or, rather, by having access precisely to

the real? This presupposes a scale of being with many more degrees than ours. For let us make no mistake. It is not enough to concede that our predecessors, in the West, had a conception of the Imagination that was too rationalistic and too intellectualized. If we do not have available a cosmology whose schema can include, as does the one that belongs to our traditional philosophers, the plurality of universes in ascensional order, our Imagination will remain *unbalanced*, its recurrent conjunctions with the will to power will be an endless source of horrors. We will be continually searching for a new discipline of the Imagination, and we will have great difficulty in finding it as long as we persist in seeing in it only a certain way of keeping our *distance* with regard to what we call the *real*, and in order to exert an influence on that real. Now, that real appears to us as arbitrarily limited, as soon as we compare it to the real that our traditional theosophers have glimpsed, and that limitation degrades the reality itself. In addition, it is always the word *fantasy* that appears as an excuse: literary fantasy, for example, or preferably, in the taste and style of the day, social fantasy.

But it is impossible to avoid wondering whether the *mundus imaginalis*, in the proper meaning of the term, would of necessity be lost and leave room only for the imaginary if something like a secularization of the *imaginal* into the *imaginary* were not required for the fantastic, the horrible, the monstrous, the macabre, the miserable, and the absurd to triumph. On the other hand, the art and imagination of Islamic culture in its traditional form are characterized by the hieratic and the serious, by gravity, stylization, and meaning. Neither our utopias, nor our science fiction, nor the sinister "*omega* point"-nothing of that kind succeeds in leaving this world or attaining *Na-koja-Abad*. Those who have known the "eighth climate" have not invented utopias, nor is the ultimate thought of Shi'ism a social or political fantasy, but it is an eschatology, because it is an *expectation* which is, as such, a *real Presence* here and now in another world, and a testimony to that other world.

111. TOPOGRAPHIES OF THE "EIGHTH CLIMATE"

We ought here to examine the extensive theory of the witnesses to that other world. We ought to question all those mystics who, in Islam, repeated the visionary experience of the heavenly assumption of the Prophet Muhammad (the *mi'raj*), which offers more than one feature in common with the account, preserved in an old gnostic book, of the celestial visions of the prophet Isaiah. There, the activity of imaginative perception truly assumes the aspect of a *hierognosis*, a higher sacral knowledge. But in order to complete our discussion, I will limit myself to describing several features typical of accounts taken from Shi'ite literature, because the world into which it will allow us to penetrate seems, at first sight, still to be our world, while in fact the events take place in the eighth climate-not in the imaginary, but in the imaginal world, that is, the world whose coordinates cannot be plotted on our maps, and where the Twelfth Imam, the "Hidden Imam," lives a mysterious life surrounded by his companions, who are veiled under the same incognito as the Imam. One of the most typical of these accounts is the tale of a voyage to "the Green Island situated in the White Sea."

It is impossible to describe here, even in broad terms, what constitutes the essence of Shi'ite Islam in relation to what is appropriately called Sunni orthodoxy. It is necessary, however, that we should

have, at least allusively present in mind, the theme that dominates the horizon of the mystical theosophy of Shi'ism, namely, the "eternal prophetic Reality" (*Haqiqat mohammadiya*) that is designated as "Muhammadan Logos" or "Muhammadan Light" and is composed of fourteen entities of light: the Prophet, his daughter Fatima, and the twelve Imams. This is the pleroma of the "Fourteen Pure Ones," by means of whose countenance the mystery of an eternal theophany is accomplished from world to world. Shi'ism has thus given Islamic prophetology its metaphysical foundation at the same time that it has given it lmamology as the absolutely necessary complement. This means that the sense of the Divine Revelations is not limited to the letter, to the exoteric that is the cortex and containant, and that was enunciated by the Prophet; the true sense is the hidden internal, the esoteric, what is symbolized by the cortex, and which it is incumbent upon the Imams to reveal to their followers. That is why Shi'ite theosophy eminently possesses the sense of symbols.

Moreover, the closed group or dynasty of the twelve Imams is not a political dynasty in earthly competition with other political dynasties; it projects over them, in a way, as the dynasty of the guardians of the Grail, in our Western traditions, projects over the official hierarchy of the Church. The ephemeral earthly appearance of the twelve Imams concluded with the twelfth, who, as a young child (in A.H. 260/A.D. 873) went into occultation from this world, but whose parousia the Prophet himself announced, the Manifestation at the end of our Aion, when he would reveal the hidden meaning of all Divine Revelations and fill the earth with justice and peace, as it will have been filled until then with violence and tyranny. Present simultaneously in the past and the future, the Twelfth Imam, the Hidden Imam, has been for ten centuries the *history* itself of Shi'ite consciousness, a history over which, of course, historical criticism loses its rights, for its events, although real, nevertheless do not have the reality of events in our climates, but they have the reality of those in the "eighth climate," events of the soul which are visions. His occultation occurred at two different times: the minor occultation (260/873) and the major occultation (330/942).17 Since then, the Hidden Imam is in the position of those who were removed from the visible world without crossing the threshold of death: Enoch, Elijah, and Christ himself, according to the teaching of the Qur'an. He is the Imam "hidden from the senses, but present in the heart of his followers," in the words of the consecrated formula, for he remains the mystical pole [*qotb*] of this world, the *pole of poles*, without whose existence the human world could not continue to exist. There is an entire Shi'ite literature about those to whom the Imam has manifested himself, or who have approached him but without seeing him, during the period of the Great Occultation.

Of course, an understanding of these accounts postulates certain premises that our preceding analyses permit us to accept. The first point is that the Imam lives in a mysterious place that is by no means among those that empirical geography can verify; it cannot be situated on our maps. This place "outside of place" nonetheless has its own topography. The second point is that life is not limited to the conditions of our visible material world with its biological laws that we know. There are events in the life of the Hidden Imam-even descriptions of his five sons, who are the governors of mysterious cities. The third point is that in his last letter to his last visible representative, the Imam warned against the imposture of people who would pretend to quote him, to have seen him, in order to lay claim to a public or political role in his name. But the Imam never excluded the fact that he would manifest himself to aid someone in material or moral distress-a lost traveler, for example, or a believer who is in despair.

These manifestations, however, never occur except at the initiative of the Imam; and if he appears most often in the guise of a young man of supernatural beauty, almost always, subject to exception, the person granted the privilege of this vision is only conscious afterward, later, of whom he has seen. A strict incognito covers these manifestations; that is why the religious event here can never be socialized. The same incognito covers the Imam's companions, that elite of elites composed of young people in his service. They form an esoteric hierarchy of a strictly limited number, which

remains permanent by means of substitution from generation to generation. This mystical order of knights, which surrounds the Hidden Imam, is subject to an incognito as strict as that of the knights of the Grail, inasmuch as they do not lead anyone to themselves. But someone who has been led there will have penetrated for a moment into the eighth climate; for a moment he will have been "in the totality of the Heaven of his soul."

That was indeed the experience of a young Iranian shaykh, 'Ali ibn Fazel Mazandarani, toward the end of our thirteenth century, an experience recorded in the *Account of strange and marvelous things that he contemplated and saw with his own eyes on the Green Island situated in the White Sea*. I can only give a broad outline of this account here, without going into the details that guarantee the means and authenticity of its transmission.18 The narrator himself gives a long recital of the years and circumstances of his life preceding the event; we are dealing with a scholarly and spiritual personality who has both feet on the ground. He tells us how he emigrated, how in Damascus he followed the teaching of an Andalusian shaykh, and how he became attached to this shaykh; and when the latter left for Egypt, he together with a few other disciples accompanied him. From Cairo he followed him to Andalusia, where the shaykh had suddenly been called by a letter from his dying father. Our narrator had scarcely arrived in Andalusia when he contracted a fever that lasted for three days. Once recovered, he went into the village and saw a strange group of men who had come from a region near the land of the Berbers, not far from the "peninsula of the Shi'ites." He is told that the journey takes twenty-five days, with a large desert to cross. He decides to join the group. Up to this point, we are still more or less on the geographical map.

But it is no longer at all certain that we are still on it when our traveler reaches the peninsula of the Shi'ites, a peninsula surrounded by four walls with high massive towers; the outside wall borders the coast of the sea. He asks to be taken to the principal mosque. There, for the first time, he hears, during the muezzin's call to prayer, resounding from the minaret of the mosque, the Shl'ite invocation asking that "Joy should hasten," that is, the joy of the future Appearance of the Imam, who is now hidden. In order to understand his emotion and his tears, it is necessary to think of the heinous persecutions, over the course of many centuries and over vast portions of the territory of Islam, that reduced the Shi'ites, the followers of the holy Imams, to a state of secrecy. Recognition among Shi'ites is effected here again in the observation, in a typical manner, of the customs of the "discipline of the arcanum."

Our pilgrim takes up residence among his own, but he notices in the course of his walks that there is no sown field in the area. Where do the inhabitants obtain their food? He learns that food comes to them from "the Green Island situated in the White Sea," which is one of the islands belonging to the sons of the Hidden Imam. Twice a year, a flotilla of seven ships brings it to them. That year the first voyage had already taken place; it would be necessary to wait four months until the next voyage.The account describes the pilgrim passing his days, overwhelmed by the kindness of the inhabitants, but in an anguish of expectation, walking tirelessly along the beach, always watching the high sea, toward the west, for the arrival of the ships. We might be tempted to believe that we are on the African coast of the Atlantic and that the Green Island belongs, perhaps, to the Canaries or the "Fortunate Isles." The details that follow will suffice to undeceive us. Other traditions place the Green Island elsewhere-in the Caspian Sea, for example-as though to indi- cate to us that it has no coordinates in the geography of this world.

Finally, as if according to the law of the "eighth climate" ar- dent desire has shortened space, the seven ships arrive somewhat in advance and make their entry into the port. From the largest of the ships descends a shaykh of noble and commanding appearance,with a handsome face and magnificent clothes. A conversation begins,and our pilgrim realizes with astonishment that the shaykh already knows everything about him, his name and his origin. The shaykh is his

Companion, and he tells him that he has come to find him: together they will leave for the Green Island. This episode bears a characteristic feature of the gnostic'sfeeling everywhere and always: he is an exile, separated from his own people, whom he barely remembers, and he has still less an idea of the way that will take him back to them. One day, though, a message arrives from them, as in the "Song of the Pearl" in the *Acts of Thomas*, as in the "Tale of Western Exile" by Sohravardi. Here, there is something better than a message: it is one of the companions of the Imam in person. Our narrator exclaims movingly: "Upon hearing these words, I was overwhelmed with happiness. *Someone remembered me, my name was known to them!*" Was his exile at an end? From now on, he is entirely certain that the itinerary cannot be transferred onto our maps.

The crossing lasts sixteen days, after which the ship enters an area where the waters of the sea are completely white; the Green Island is outlined on the horizon. Our pilgrim learns from his Companion that the White Sea forms an uncrossable zone of protection around the island; no ship manned by the enemies of the Imam and his people can venture there without the waves engulfing it. Our travelers land on the Green Island. There is a city at the edge of the sea; seven walls with high towers protect the precincts (this is the preeminent symbolic plan). There are luxuriant vegetation and abundant streams. The buildings are constructed from diaphanous marble. All the inhabitants have beautiful and young faces, and they wear magnificent clothes. Our Iranian shaykh feels his heart fill with joy, and from this point on, throughout the entire second part, his account will take on the rhythm and the meaning of an *initiation account*, in which we can distinguish three phases. There is an initial series of conversations with a noble personage who is none other than a grandson of the Twelfth Imam (the son of one of his five sons), and who governs the Green Island: Sayyed Shamsoddin These conversations compose a first initiation into the secret of the Hidden Imam; they take place sometimes in the shadow of: mosque and sometimes in the serenity of gardens filled with per fumed trees of all kinds. There follows a visit to a mysterious sanctuary in the heart of the mountain that is the highest pea on the island. Finally, there is a concluding series of conversations of decisive importance with regard to the possibility or in possibility of having a vision of the Imam.

I am giving the briefest possible summary here, and I must pass over in silence the details of scenery depiction and of an intensely animated dramaturgy, in order to note only the central episode. At the summit or at the heart of the mountain, which is in the center of the Green Island, there is a small temple, with a cupola, where one can communicate with the Imam, because it happens that he leaves a personal message there, but no one is permitted to ascend to this temple except Sayyed Shamsoddin and those who are like him. This small temple stands in the shadow of the *Tuba* tree; now, we know that this is the name of the tree that shades Paradise; it is the *Tree of Being*. The temple is at the edge of a spring, which, since it gushes at the base of the Tree of Paradise, can only be the *Spring of Life*. In order to confirm this for us, our pilgrim meets there the incumbent of this temple, in whom we recognize the mysterious prophet Khezr (Khadir). It is there, at the heart of being, in the shade of the Tree and at the edge of the Spring, that the sanctuary is found where the Hidden Imam may be most closely approached. Here we have an entire constellation of easily recognizable archetypal symbols.

We have learned, among other things, that access to the little mystical temple was only permitted to a' person who, by attainMg the spiritual degree at which the Imam has become his personal internal Guide, has attained a state "similar" to that of the actual descendant of the Imam. This is why the idea of internal conformation is truly at the center of the initiation account, and it is this that permits the pilgrim to learn other secrets of the Green Island: for example, the symbolism of a particularly eloquent ritual.[19] In the Shi'ite liturgical calendar, Friday is the weekday especially dedicated to the Twelfth Imam. Moreover, in the lunar calendar, the middle of the month marks the midpoint of the lunar cycle, and the middle of the month of Sha'ban is the anniversary date of the birth of the

Twelfth Imam into this world. On a Friday, then, while our Iranian pilgrim is praying in the mosque, he hears a great commotion outside. His initiator, Sayyed, informs him that each time the day of the *middle of the month* falls on a Friday, the chiefs of the mysterious militia thatsurrounds the Imam assemble in "expectation of joy," a consecrated term, as we know, which means: in the expectation of the Manifestation of the Imam in this world. Leaving the mosque, he sees a gathering of horsemen from whom a triumphal clamor rises. These are the 313 chiefs of the supernatural order of knights always present incognito in this world, in the service of the Imam. This episode leads us gradually to the final scenes that precede the farewell. Like a leitmotiv, the expression of the desire to see the Imam returns ceaselessly. Our pilgrim will learn that twice in his life he was in the Imams presence: he was lost in the desert and the Imam came to his aid. But as is an almost constant rule, he knew nothing of it then; he learns of it now that he has come to the Green Island. Alas, he must leave this island; the order cannot be rescinded; the ships are waiting, the same one on which he arrived. But even more than for the voyage outward, it is impossible for us to mark out the itinerary that leads from the "eighth climate" to this world. Our traveler obliterates his tracks, but he will keep some material evidence of his sojourn: the pages of notes taken in the course of his conversations with the Imam's grandson, and the parting gift from the latter at the moment of farewell.

The account of the Green Island allows us an abundant harvest of symbols: (1) It is one of the islands belonging to the son of the Twelfth Imam. (2) It is that island, where the Spring of Life gushes, in the shade of the Tree of Paradise, that ensure the sustenance of the Imams followers who live far away, an that sustenance can only be a "suprasubstantial" food. (3) It situated in the west, as the city of Jabarsa is situated in the we of the *mundus imaginalis*, and thus it offers a strange analogy with the paradise of the East, the paradise of Amitabha in Pure Land Buddhism; similarly, the figure of the Twelfth Imam suggestive of comparison with Maitreya, the future Buddha; there is also an analogy with Tir-na'n-0g, one of the worlds the Afterlife among the Celts, the land of the West and the forever ever young. (4) Like the domain of the Grail, it is an interworld that is self-sufficient. (5) It is protected against and immune to any attempt from outside. (6) only one who is summoned there can find the way. (7) A mountain rises in the center; we have noted the symbols that it conceals. (8) Like Mont-Salvat, the inviolable Green Island is the place where his followers approach the mystical *pole* of the world, the Hidden Imam, reigning invisibly over this age- the jewel of the Shi'ite faith.

This tale is completed by others, for, as we have mentioned, nothing has been said until now about the islands under the reign of the truly extraordinary figures who are the five sons of the Hidden Imam (homologues of those whom Shi'ism designates as the "Five Personages of the Mantle"20 and perhaps also of those whom Manichaeism designates as the "Five Sons of the Living Spirit"). An earlier tale21 (it is from the middle of the twelfth century and the narrator is a Christian) provides us with complementary topographical information. Here again it involves travelers who suddenly realize that their ship has entered a completely unknown area. They land at a first island, *al Mobaraka*, the Blessed City. Certain difficulties, brought about by the presence among them of Sunni Muslims, oblige them to travel farther. But their captain refuses; he is afraid of the unknown region. They have to hire a new crew. In succession, we learn the names of the five islands and the names of those who govern them: *al-Zahera*, the City Blooming with Flowers; *al Ra'yeqa*, the Limpid City; *al-Safiya*, the Serene City, etc. Whoever manages to gain admittance to them enters into joy forever. Five islands, five cities, five sons of the Imam, twelve months to travel through the islands (two months for each of the first four, four months for the fifth), all of these numbers having a symbolic significance. Here, too, the tale turns into an initiation account; all the travelers finally embrace the Shi'ite faith.

As there is no rule without an exception, I will conclude by citing in condensed form a tale illustrating a case of manifestation of the Imam in person.22 The tale is from the tenth century. An Iranian from Hamadan made the pilgrimage to Mecca. On the way back, a day's journey from Mecca (more than two thousand kilometers from Hamadan), having imprudently gone astray during the night, he loses his companions. In the morning he is wandering alone in the desert and placing his trust in God, Suddenly, he sees a garden that neither he nor anyone else has ever heard of. He enters it. At the door of a pavilion, two young pages dressed in white await him and lead him to a young mar of supernatural beauty. To his fearful and awestruck astonishment, he learns that he is in the presence of the Twelfth Imam The latter speaks to him about his future Appearance and finally addressing him by name, asks him whether he wants to return to his home and family. Certainly, he wants to do so. The Imam signals to one of his pages, who gives the traveler a purse, take him by the hand, and guides him through the gardens. The, walk together until the traveler sees a group of houses, a mosque, and shade trees that seem familiar to him. Smiling, the page asks him: "Do you know this land?" "Near where I live in Hamadan" he replies, "there is a land called Asadabad, which exactly resembles this place." The page says to him, "But *you are in Asadabad*. "Amazed, the traveler realizes that he is actually near his home. He turns around; the page is no longer then he is all alone, but he still has in his hand the viaticum that ha been given to him. Did we not say a little while ago that the *where*, the *ubi* of the "eighth climate" is an *ubique?*

I know how many commentaries can be applied to these tale depending upon whether we are metaphysicians, traditionalist or not, or whether we are psychologists. But by way of provisional conclusion, I prefer to limit myself to asking three small questions:

1. We are no longer participants in a traditional culture; we live in a scientific civilization that is extending its control, it said, even to images. It is commonplace today to speak of a "civilization of the image" (thinking of our magazines, cinema, and television). But one wonders whether, like all commonplace this does not conceal a radical misunderstanding, a complete error. For instead of the image being elevated to the level of a world that would be proper to it, instead of it appearing invested with a *symbolic function*, leading to an internal sense, there is above all a reduction of the image to the level of sensory perception pure and simple, and thus a definitive degradation of the image. Should it not be said, therefore, that the more successful this reduction is, the more the sense of the *imaginal* is lost, and the more we are condemned to producing only the *imaginary?*

2. In the second place, all imagery, the scenic perspective of a tale like the voyage to the Green Island, or the sudden encounter with the Imam in an unknown oasis-would all this be possible without the absolutely primary and irreducible, objective, initial fact (*Urphanomen*) of a world of image-archetypes or image-sources whose origin is nonrational and whose incursion into our world is unforeseeable, but whose postulate compels recognition?

3. In the third place, is it not precisely this postulate of the objectivity of the *imaginal world* that is suggested to us, or imposed on us, by certain forms or certain symbolic emblems (hermetic, kabbalistic; or *mandalas*) that have the quality of effecting a magic display of mental images, such that they assume an objective reality?

To indicate in what sense it is possible to have an idea of how to respond to the question concerning the *objective* reality of supernatural figures and encounters with them, I will simply refer to an extraordinary text, where Villiers de L'Isle-Adam speaks about the face of the inscrutable Messenger with eyes of clay; it "could not be perceived except by the spirit. Creatures experience only influences that arc inherent in the archangelic entity. "Angels," he writes, "*are not*, in substance, except in the free sublimity of the absolute Heavens, where reality is unified with the

ideal.... They only externalize themselves in the ecstasy they cause and which forms a part of themselves."[23]

Those last words, *an ecstasy ... which forms part of themselves*, seem to me to possess a prophetic clarity, for they have the quality of piercing even the granite of doubt, of paralyzing the "agnostic reflex," in the sense that they break the reciprocal isolation of the consciousness and its object, of thought and being; phenomenology is now an ontology. Undoubtedly, this is the postulate implied in the teaching of our authors concerning the *imaginal*. For there is no external criterion for the manifestation of the Angel, other than the manifestation itself. The Angel is itself the *ekstasis*, the "displacement" or the departure from ourselves that is a "change of state" from our state. That is why these words also suggest to us the secret of the supernatural being of the "Hidden Imam" and of his Appearances for the Shi'ite consciousness: the Imam is the *ekstasis* itself of that consciousness. One who is not in the same spiritual state cannot see him.

This is what Sohravardi alluded to in his tale of "The Crimson Archangel" by the words that we cited at the beginning: "If you are Khezr, you also may pass without difficulty through the mountain of Qaf."

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